through the evidence of practical working builders, carpenters, and bricklayers, with a view to ensure a safer mode of erecting places constructed chiefly of bricks. The jury, moreover, cannot separate without stating their conviction, that an effectual supervision of the work, in all its divisions, was not exercised by the persons having authority over it, at the time when the houses in question were being built."

Specimens of the mortar have been submitted to us by several parties; we had, however, examined the ruins immediately after the occurrence, and are compelled to say, that the work was far from what it ought to have been, and at the same time to acknowledge, with some of the witnesses, that it was no worse than is to be found in many other cases. The whole was lying a mass of rubbish on the ground; the bricks had separated entirely from the mortar, and were as clean as if they had never been used.

We have on various occasions pointed out the imperfect manner in which bricklaying is now performed in England, and the causes which have led to this state of things. "Operatives, speaking generally, have ceased to feel interested in the production of good work; all they desire is to get over the ground, and very often this is the case with their masters too." "Hasty bad work, induced by competition and the operations of speculative builders, has become so much the habit of our bricklayers, that it is difficult to find men capable of producing superior work; or, at all events, it is difficult to induce them to abandon their hasty, careless mode of proceeding, and exercise the skill they possess."* Use begets indifference: whatever has answered the purpose once, will do so again, it is thought; and so men go on, house after house, in the same defective course, without once thinking of its inefficiency, or making any efforts at improvement. The use of hungry sand dug on the spot, little fitted for the purpose; mortar joints three-fourths of an inch thick; upright joints one over another, and scarcely any headers running through the wall,—are defects to be found in half the buildings erected: and we mention them here, not with reference particularly to the failure under notice, but to the present state of house-building generally. The wonder is, not that an accident does occasionally, too often, indeed, occur, but that structures so raised should stand at all. We repeat our agreement, therefore, with those who said the work in Alfred-place, bad as it was, was not worse than in many other houses, and we are not disposed to give more blame to the workmen engaged where it did fall, than to those who were concerned where it happened to stand.

The surveyor employed by the ground landlord is the same gentleman who recently thought fit to advertise an impudent piece of special pleading, to contradict a fact stated in our columns. Were we actuated by motives such as he was silly enough to ascribe to us on that occasion, the present occurrence would offer opportunity far too tempting to be passed over. In order, however, that we may run no chance of being misinterpreted, we withhold comment on his share in the transaction.

In the case of the district surveyor, Mr. Donaldson, we can speak without the probability of misconception; and even if it were not so, should still feel bound to express our opinion on a part of the statement made by that gentleman, involving as it does a question in which the public are importantly concerned.

Mr. Donaldson said "that his duty was only to attend to the thickness of the walls. The landlord's surveyor was the proper person to object to bad materials. He, the district surveyor, could not prevent builders using bats. He had only to do with the quality of the bricks used, and not with the form or size." Now, from the inference to be drawn from this, and other parts of Mr. Donaldson's evidence, namely, that the district surveyor has nothing to do with the stability of the structure under his superintendence, so long as he finds that the bricks are good, and the walls of the thickness prescribed, we entirely dissent; and if this opinion be held by the district surveyors generally, as we *know* it is by some, it is quite time that a proper understanding on the point should be come to.

Unless the Act provides for the public safety, it does nothing, or, rather, worse than nothing. Why are we willing to pay ten shillings, to the proper officer when we put on a four feet chimney-pot, and another ten shillings when we want to cut an opening for a window in the back wall,—to say nothing of the three guineas when we first built the house,—but on the ground, that by the arrangement which compels this, we get rid of the risk of a neighbour's pot falling on our heads, or another man letting down his wall at the moment we are passing. If, however, notwithstanding the payment,—payments to the extent of 20,000*l.* in fourteen months, be it remembered,—a man may still so form his roof as to thrust out the front of his house, or our neighbour so construct a wall of bats without bond, that it will fall in upon us before it is finished, away goes all assurance of safety; and the question naturally arises, what are we paying for? It cannot be for imposing on ourselves annoying regulations;—certainly not to provide incomes for a certain number of surveyors. If it is not for the general safety, it is for nothing.

What says the Act itself? It is for "regulating the construction of buildings;" the surveyors appointed are to be in "possession of due scientific and practical qualifications,"—(what for, if not to determine when work is properly or improperly done); they are to see that every external and party-wall is "based upon solid ground, or upon other sufficient foundation;" that every external wall and party-wall "be built of sound bricks or of stone, laid in and with mortar or cement in such manner as to produce *solid work*," and that every chimney breast "be of sound bricks properly bonded, and the joints of the work filled in with *good* mortar or cement;—so that it is clear district surveyors *are* the proper persons to complain if the materials or workmanship be improper; and in fact, if they do not do so, are neglecting the duty they have solemnly declared they will faithfully perform. Their real office is not to raise difficulties and obstacles by a quibbling reading, or a capricious adherence to the letter of the Act in every unimportant particular,—not to manufacture reasons for obtaining fees, but to see the great purpose of the Act properly carried out, namely to protect the public and promote the general welfare.

Leaving the general question, we would say a few words on Mr. Donaldson's remark, that "a house might as well be run up in six weeks as in six months," and we do so because we fear it is calculated, expressed thus without modification, to have a bad effect. If a house be built in good weather; with sound stock bricks, and not more than enough mortar, of Thames sand and stone lime; if the arches be put in, and four or five courses of bricks all round the building, be carried up in Roman cement (without which iron hoop bond is unquestionably less efficient than the old wood bond, with all its faults), then it may be done without risk with great rapidity. In the case, however, of the mass of houses built on speculation, in five instances out of six, none of these requirements are attended to, and the haste alluded to would obviously be dangerous in the extreme.

The latter part of the verdict will doubtless lead to some discussion, many of the best houses erected in London during the last ten years, having no wood bond; but we cannot now go further into the subject.

* P. 193, Vol. III.

## PRACTICE OF FRESCO PAINTING.*

### HISTORICAL AND DECORATIVE ART.

Mr. Buss commenced his second lecture by giving a hasty sketch of the progress of fresco in Italy, from the revival of art under the Greek painters, to its highest point of excellence at the period of Michael Angelo, Raffaelle, Leonardo da Vinci, and Corregio; from thence to its gradual decline into mere allegory, dexterity of manifestation and conventional display; and ultimately, to its comparative disuse in assisting the architect to adorn the interior of public buildings, or the mansions of the nobility. Fresco was superseded by the use of oil, which latter, by its superior power of mere imitation, mainly assisted in producing the abandonment of fresco painting.

The depressed state of art, especially that employed to embellish ceilings, staircases, halls, and churches, was at length so distasteful to the French artists, that as a school they endeavoured to improve it, by having recourse to the treasures of antiquity; and, losing sight of nature, produced under David and many of his school, mere imitations of the antique statues, with little or no appearance of vitality in the figures they introduced upon their canvass. In Germany the artists having experience of the vicious style of David and his followers, sought for a renovation of their school, by studying profoundly the works of the early Italian painters preceding Raffaelle; which works they considered purer in sentiment, and essentially befitting a style of art professing to be truly Christian, and unmixed with the classic forms, allusions, and allegories, which afterwards became engrafted upon the arts. Cornelius and other German artists explained their views, and the Chevalier Bartholdy immediately gave them an opportunity of carrying out their intentions, by having his villa painted. This example was followed by another patron, and was approved by the king of Bavaria, who, when an occasion offered, became the liberal encourager of Cornelius and his friends, and has given existence and renown to the present German school of art. At the time when Chevalier Bartholdy laid the foundation-stone of the German school, by having his villa painted, at a very moderate remuneration to the artists, there were many English artists and English noblemen in Rome; but so great an example was not then considered worthy to be followed.

In France, fresco appears to be superseded by encaustic painting, in which latter style the Madeleine Church, and that of Notre Dame de Lorette, are painted. Some frescoes are to be seen in a few churches which have a good effect, those in St. Sulpice excepted, which are, in choice of subject and arrangement of light, shade, and colour, quite unsuited to fresco, and extremely vulgar in sentiment; fortunately they are dropping off the walls and ceilings. M. Delaroche has lately executed a surprising work in the hemicycle of the Ecole des Beaux Arts; this is painted in oil upon an absorbent ground of plaster, so that the surface of the picture is almost entirely free from gloss. In this country, fresco has been formerly much used in the decoration of churches, public edifices, and even dwelling-houses, as discoveries prove on occasions, when surviving good taste, and a love for ancient monuments, have removed the cumbrous screens, false ceilings, wainscotings, and other architectural abominations, which igoorance, bigotry, or churchwardenism, had thrust before some of our finest antiquities.

* See p. 518, *ante*.

For more information on OCR and PDF Compression go to our website